

A
LETTER

TO

Mr. D'ANVERS

Concerning the

LIBERTY

OF THE

PRESS.

Procaz Libertas Civitatem miscuit.

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LETTER

AND ANSWERS

TO THE

REVEREND

FATHER

OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL

CHURCH

OF

NEW-YORK

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L E T T E R

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Mr. D'ANVERS, &c.

S I R,

YOUR great Zeal for the Liberty
of the Press, will undoubtedly
render an Attempt to vindicate
it from some Injuries and Abuses per-
fectly agreeable to you. The Argu-
ments you brought for it, at your first
Entrance upon the Office, you have so
laudably executed, and the Pains you
have lately taken to recommend some

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excellent

excellent Pamphlets on the same Head, shew it's a favourite Subject, and that you think it in some Sort of Danger, tho' you have no Adversary that I can find. I wish therefore you would trace that Danger, or the Apprehension that gives you any Uneasiness to its true Cause.

All that I design in this Address is to put you in mind that every good Argument for the Liberty of the Press, is as good an Argument against the Abuse of it. There are Enemies enough always ready to gain Advantages from it, to serve their own Cause; and yet would take the first Opportunity to deprive us of it. What Pity therefore so good a Cause should suffer from any of its Friends and Advocates.

One would think there could be no great Difference among the Friends of this Liberty, about the proper Subjects upon which it should be employ'd; and yet I fear, I shall be so unhappy as to say some Things on this Head, that will not entirely meet with your Approbation: Tho' I perfectly agree with you that the Liberty of the Press, consists
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in a Power to publish our Sentiments without incurring the Penalty of any Law, or the Displeasure of the Magistrate; and that it comprehends all Points of Religion and Politicks, as much as any other. *Tacitus* has beautifully expressed it in those known Words, *Rara temporum felicitas quibus sentire quæ velis, & quæ sentias dicere licet.* A Happiness which no Nation enjoys so completely as our own, and fruitful of many Advantages, which can't be lost, without plunging us into greater Misery than other People.

It can't but affect a generous Mind to observe, that so unquestionable a Right of human Nature, which is necessary to continue one great End of Reason and Speech, should be so rarely met with in the World. And it's as grievous to observe, that this Liberty should be used without any due Regard to the Dignity and Benefit of human Nature, that Men should indulge themselves in a Faculty of distorting the true Use and Intention of Words, to impose upon one another, to palliate what they know is wrong, and to ridicule what inwardly they judge right,

right, and imploy those Talents which should be serviceable, or entertaining at least, to blast the Reputation and just Influence of others, without any Reason, or any Bounds but what Humour or Interest may sometimes suggest.

The End of Society wherein Men engage to contribute all in their Power towards the common Good, does at once prescribe this Freedom, and shew us the true Use of it; and all the Laws of Society, and the Behaviour of every Member of it should conform to the same Rule; and with this View only has any Man Leave and Encouragement to offer his Sentiments to the World. But he that sets up any sinister and selfish Views, in Opposition to the common Interest of his Country, takes a Liberty that he has no Manner of Right to; and tho' he may have Art and Cunning enough to disturb the Peace and Welfare of Society, and to evade the written Laws of it; yet stands condemned by that fundamental Law which commands our chief Regard to the publick Good, and to which all other Laws are only subservient. And by this
Standard,

Standard, which can never be altered, most Disputes about the Liberty of the Press may be determined; and the Reputation of a Writer will in many Cases stand or fall by it, with the wisest and best Judges.

There are some Limitations which how minute soever they appear, and of no great Importance, yet according to this Rule ought always to accompany the Liberty of the Press, and should particularly be observed by those who treat of the arduous Affairs of Government, and write to instruct or reprove Men in high Stations. I doubt not but you agree with me, that a strict Regard to Truth, and Justness in their Thoughts and Expressions, should be preserved by such Writers. I know this is looked upon as a trivial Circumstance by most Dealers in Politicks; but that I suppose arises from not attending to the End they ought to have in View, nor to what is much inferior to it, their own Reputation; for tho' some may be caught by false Colours, yet wiser Men will see with Indignation an Attempt to impose upon them.

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All Artifices therefore, Innuendo's, and Disguises should be utterly laid aside, which don't inform the Mind of Truth, nor lead us into a fair Judgment of Men or Things; nor have any Tendency to excite a just Regard to the common Good. A Liberty to write in this Manner is not worth pleading for. Besides these loose and ambiguous Methods are never like to make any deeper Impression upon the Minds of those you design to wound, than of those you design to instruct. A Man may read them with all the Indifference and Tranquillity in the World, and with some Pleasure, to find his bitterest Enemies put to such poor Shifts, and conclude they have more of the Will than the Power to hurt him, which, 'tis generally thought, has been too much your Case.

Decency likewise is a Circumstance not entirely to be neglected by these Writers, and would be a particular Ornament to a Man zealous for the Liberty of the Press; and the more, because it's so rarely to be met with in Authors who engage in Opposition, Censure and Satyr.

Satyr. Political Indecencies I confess are but little regarded, because Men are chiefly influenced by Passion in Quarrels of that Kind, and some are so extravagant, as to think that the most abusive Methods of Attack are lawful in these Disputes. But if there is no Law in Reason, nor in Society, that allows them, it's in vain to think they can receive any Sanction from the *Liberty of the Press*; for they really tend very much to the Disgrace of that good Cause: All therefore who are zealous for it, should in Justice to the Publick, as well as to themselves, and others, suffer nothing to pass without aiming at this Qualification.

And nothing can be more contrary to it, than to make bitter Reflections without solid Reasons, than to treat Persons of the greatest Dignity and Character with Contempt, than to wound the Reputation of others by dark Suggestions; and the greatest of all to scatter such bold Insinuations, as can't be construed without striking at the Wisdom and Authority of the most sacred Person.

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Consistence I don't find of any great Moment towards recommending the Liberty of the Press, for if a Man has a Mind to write ever so inconsistently, where is the Harm of it? who is like to suffer but himself? and who can hinder a Man from being as free with his own Reputation as he pleases? yet there may be some Cases wherein it may be incumbent upon a Man to be consistent, not so much for his own Sake, as the Publick. For he that undertakes to defame and slander the Proceedings of a Government, or Ministry, ought in Justice to discover some better Measures; otherwise he injures the Publick by defaming what he does not understand, and can't mend; or else is resolved not to make Use of the Liberty of the Press to answer any true and valuable End.

For unless this Liberty is made Use of to promote the Welfare of Mankind, it's good for nothing; and when perverted to a contrary Purpose, is as pernicious and criminal, as any other Sort of Licentiousness. Therefore I should think the best Support of this Liberty, would be to shew the good Tendency and wholesome Effects of your weekly Journals,

Journals, because at present it is so well established, that it needs no other Arguments, than its own proper Fruits and Effects. But to make the Liberty of the Press a Defence, or Apology for ~~any~~ ^{your} Writings, is a little preposterous, as if this Liberty could be a Warrant for a Man to publish whatever he had a Mind to, without regarding the true End and Design of it. He that aims openly and honestly at the Good of his Country needs no such Cover, nor any other Excuse.

It's true, it's a popular Argument, and you may think the Reputation of a Whig, which you have sometimes very officiously desired, may be of some Service to you. But the Liberty which the Whigs have pleaded for, and practised, is to assert their Rights when illegally invaded, to defend their Privileges, and Properties against manifest Usurpation; and not to strike at legal Authority, or to load with Odium and Infamy the Actions of a Ministry that are conformable to the Laws; or to raise Clamours and Discontent, when we are in the Possession of all the Happiness

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which as *Britons* we can claim, when every Man's Property, and the publick Credit are as firmly established as ever. He that does this, can never pass for a true Friend to Liberty, but must be too much engaged to his Passions and Interest, to have any great Concern for the common Rights of Mankind.

And I can't conceive, that the Liberty of the Press does authorise any Man to publish what is not his Sentiments, to talk seriously or ludicrously of Things of Moment, with a Design to instil what he does not believe himself, or any way to abuse the Credulity of his Admirers, I don't impute this to you, Sir, for I am very much of Opinion there is scarce any Notion so wild and strange, and absurd, but may be imbibed by some Authors upon certain proper Occasions. But I confess you appear to me a Gentleman of as singular and extraordinary Sentiments as ever I knew make the Figure of so great a Politician.

You have given very great and just Encomiums of the late King, and of his present Majesty; and would take it as an Affront if we should question your Sincerity.

Sincerity. But you will give us Leave to enquire what is the most natural, certain, and obvious Proof of the Wisdom and Goodness of a Prince; and if you should produce a thousand Arguments, and leave out one, you would meet with very few of your Mind; because 'tis so much the Property of those excellent Qualities to take Pleasure, and to place Confidence, only where there is some Degree of Likeness; and for divers other Reasons.

But instead of that, you have given us the direct contrary; you have ascribed the greatest Virtues to your Prince, and at the same Time have ascribed the greatest Vices to his Ministers, to those whom he honours with the most important Commands. What must we believe? 'tis as plain as can be desired, that in one Part you are sincere enough, how to acquit you in the other is the Difficulty.

That you who have lived so long in the World, and past through so many Reigns, and a great Variety of good and bad Times, should deliver this as the Result of your Observations, and Discoveries is
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somewhat surprising. That the best of Princes may choose the most corrupt, abandoned and vicious Ministers. And continue them for some Years, without knowing what their Ministers are doing? or whether their People enjoy their Liberties, and are governed by Law or not?

If this is the only Way to bring your self off, from an Imputation too gross to be owned, it ought to be supported by very good Reasons, and proper Examples; and till you give us them, we must conclude as much as if you had never advanced this Paradox, that the Wisdom and Goodness of the King shine in the Choice of his Ministers, which is plain and obvious, and abundantly confirmed by Facts, and the Happiness so sensibly felt by all Ranks and Parties among us; which can't be balanced by the gravest Speculations on the contrary Side. At the same Time we must continue in Suspense at least, whether you don't abuse the Goodness of your Prince, to cover some Designs, that would have but an untoward Aspect, if they were stripped of all Disguises.

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I won't refer you to *Trajan*, or *Antoninus*, *Tiberius*, or *Nero*, for good and bad Princes are as well known by their Ministry, as private Persons by their Company. Look back but upon the Reign of the late Queen. Was not her Ministry the constant, certain Indication of her Views and Designs? Who ever questioned her Wisdom and Goodness, while she employ'd a Set of wise and brave Patriots? And did she change these without first changing her own Sentiments? Had she the same Regard for the Blessings of the Protestant Succession, in the latter Part of her Reign, as before? or did this Nation ever know a more critical and dangerous Juncture than in the Year 1713, and Part of the following?

Times, whatever you think now, when every one who had any true Value for our happy Constitution, trembled to think of the Harmony between the Prince and her Ministry; and could find no Relief from the Goodness of the one, tho' it was urged as a Security against the Designs of the other; with as much Art as you can pretend to, and was thought
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as proper to serve some Purposes then, as the same Doctrine is now; but with no great Effect.

Such a Conjunction, according to all the Laws of Society, not only make it allowable, but meritorious, to expose as much as possible the dark and pernicious Measures that are in Agitation; wherein a People have a Right to be informed of their Danger, and to take the same Methods for their Defence, as are taking for their Ruin.

They who helped to unfold the mysterious and destructive Counsels of those Days, and stood up for our Rights against Encroachments that were most notorious, and threatening, must be dear to all who have a just Value for the present Establishment, which then lay at Stake; particularly that *incomparable Gentleman*, who is now become the Object of your Hatred, was too good a Patriot to miss the Resentment of those at the Helm; and too great a Check to be born, by a Set of Men who were for hastning us into Confusion, and resolved to lose no Time. They thought it necessary to get him out of the Way, and shew'd

shew'd their good Will by laying hold on the sorryest Pretences. But what they designed for his Disgrace, you may remember was then by all the Friends of Liberty, counted his great Honour; and I believe has been so ever since, and always will, if that ancient Observation is true, that *nothing can be more for the Honour of a Senator, than for ill-designing Men to use all possible Methods to get him out of the Way.*

And I can't but applaud your honest Intention, to gain the like Honour by attacking the present Administration; tho' I fear the Happiness we at present enjoy is a Circumstance that will not allow it, and that you must wait for such another Juncture, which is not likely to happen in your Time, or be content to go without it; for there is no Room for such Attempts, when all the Advantages of the Protestant Succession are secured to us, as when they were in the utmost Danger. We have now a Prince, according to your own Confession, justly admired for his great Virtues. His Concern for the Liberty

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and Prosperity of his People, is a Pillar that failed us then; and with all your Artifices to the contrary makes that a Crime now, which was then a Virtue.

Sure you never was more unhappy in choosing a Precedent, whether it proceeded from a Hurry through your great Affairs, and the Importunity of your Correspondents, or Change of Sentiments, I shall not enquire. But your *argumentum ad hominem* is the unluckiest Thing you could have pitched upon, for a Warrant to justify your Attempts, because it revives the Memory of such Services, as will ever be to the Honour of that Gentleman, you so incessantly labour to vilify, and recoils upon your self; for if you think there is the same Reason to oppose the present Administration as there was then, you ought to let us know what you think we have gained by the Protestant Succession; and how your Admiration of the Royal Virtues can consist with the Parallel you draw, which, whether just or not, is absolutely necessary to make out your Argument; and unless you will take the
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the Trouble of explaining your self, we must satisfy ourselves with drawing the best Conclusions we can from your own Principles, which are so plain, that I think no Body can mistake them.

The Liberty of the Press is undoubtedly designed for the Benefit of Mankind, and should as far as possible yield rational Pleasure and Satisfaction; but it is a great Abuse of it to make it an Engine to spread Calumnies and Accusations. If you have a Quarrel or Prejudice against any Man, have you a Right to hunt him down by Reproaches, Railery and Invektive? and because you hate him, must he be made odious to all Mankind? This is setting up yourself as Judge in your own Cause, contrary to the Nature of Society; and an Introduction to all Manner of Confusion, which, tho' the Laws of the Land should not be always able to prevent, yet the PUBLICK GOOD, which all political Writers ought to understand, and regard as much as any Law whatever, does utterly forbid.

Every Man's good Name is as much his Property as his Estate, as dear, it may be, and as useful; the wisest States there-

fore have taken the greatest Care to guard against Injuries herein, and to punish with Severity the Petulance and Insolence of such Scriblers, as should presume to make Sport and Diversion at the Expence of any Man's Reputation: For it's as manifest Injustice as any, and tends to destroy all good Manners, and to subvert the Peace, Order, and Harmony of Society.

And if private Men are entitled to fairer Treatment, how much more Men of the greatest Dignity, placed in the highest Stations and Employments, whose Reputation is of Consequence to the Service of their Prince and Country! To traduce and vilify such Persons, is besides all the Injuries in the former Case, a Breach of Allegiance to him whose Authority they bear, and of the Peace of Society, which is to be maintained by their Influence.

The Liberty of the Press is too good a Cause to comply with the Passions of Men, or to be made subservient to their Resentments. It is founded upon Reason, the Source of all useful Inventions and Observations; and because Knowledge

ledge neither is nor can be confined to any Party, or Body of Men, therefore the freest Exercise of Reason should be indulged to every Man, that all may have Power to improve the common Advantages put into our Hands to make Life tollerable, pleasant, and if possible happy. But the Prejudices of Men have no Manner of Tendency towards this End; and therefore the Publication of them is authorised by no Law natural, or civil.

It's too plain when Men are heated by Resentment, Disappointment, or any imaginary Wrongs, they sacrifice not to Truth, but to their Passions. They design no Discoveries that may be useful to their Country, but separately to themselves. Rage overpowers their Reason, and prompts them to propagate only such Things as tend to enflame and alienate others as much as themselves, against those they hate. If they can't be furnished with Facts, in the Zeal of their Hearts, they'll lay hold on Words, Looks, Gestures, and without any Foundation work up Insinuations and Innuendo's, that to their credulous Followers shall have

have all the Appearance, and be swallowed as undeniable Truth. If this is Liberty, I don't see but Mankind are at Liberty to devour and destroy one another; and yet one need not be at a Loss to know where such Liberties have been taken!

A designing Government would soon know what to do in such a Case. It's a Hardship only upon those who are tender of the Rights and Liberties of Mankind, who had rather bear Insults than take any Measures that are detrimental to the common Good, and will not be provoked by the notorious Miscarriages of some to deprive others; thus all the Opposition and Malignity of these worthy Writers, is a plain Testimony to the Thing they take so much Pains to contradict.

And suppose nothing can be a Forfeiture of this Privilege, while every Man is accountable only for his own Actions; yet they who are continually watching, to represent every Action and Step of the Government in the worst Light; and engage never to give over their Opposition till it succeeds, do what
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in them lies, and what has the greatest Tendency to destroy it. And every Man who is concern'd for this Liberty, must be concern'd to see any bold Attempts made to hazard it. And can you be sure, that the present Ministry, which you think not too good for endless Reflections, will never be provoked to take such a Step; or that the Measures you have taken will not pave the Way for severer Methods hereafter?

But tho' this should not be the Case, as I hope it never will, yet since the natural Tendency of such Attempts is to sharpen the Resentments of a People against their Governors, who are the Protectors of this, and all our other Liberty; to raise Jealousies and Discontent, and to disturb that Peace and Harmony among all Sorts of People, which has been the Glory of the late and present Reigns, the Fruits are bad enough. However, I hope the Wisdom and Steadiness of the Government, will be an invincible Defence of this Liberty against all Provocations, as I think the Happiness we enjoy may make every Friend of the present Establishment
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Look upon such Methods of reviling it
with Indifference or Contempt.

I am, Sir,

And upon all proper Occasions

shall be, at your Service.

F I N I S.